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Mr R Shenton
The Headteacher
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Dear Mr Shenton

SPECIAL MEASURES: MONITORING INSPECTION OF SUMMERBANK PRIMARY SCHOOL

Introduction

Following my visit with Chris Field, Additional Inspector, to your school on 1 and 2 February 2007, I write on behalf of Her Majesty's Chief Inspector to confirm the inspection findings.

The visit was the third monitoring inspection since the school became subject to special measures in November 2005.

This letter will be posted on the Ofsted website. Please inform the Regional Inspection Service Provider of any factual inaccuracies within 24 hours of the receipt of this letter.

Evidence

Inspectors observed the school's work, scrutinised documents, and met with the headteacher, deputy headteacher, the chair of governors, a representative from the local authority (LA), and the school council.

Context

The school has appointed a new full time teacher for one of the three Year 5/6 classes since the previous visit. Two supply teachers are covering temporary staff absence in one of the other Year 5/6 classes. There have been no changes to the governing body.

Achievement and standards

Achievement is improving, as reflected in the 2006 national tests results for pupils in Year 6. Results were better in mathematics and science than in English, where there was only a slight improvement. The school did not meet the realistic target it set in English. Whilst inspection evidence shows that standards in English are improving, they have not yet reached adequate levels, particularly in writing.

Children typically begin school in the Foundation Stage with skills that are very much lower than those expected for their age, particularly in their communication, language and literacy. Good teaching and learning ensure that most of the children make good progress. Teachers are rightly giving a strong emphasis to reading and writing skills in these early years to ensure there are firm foundations on which children can build key skills. Despite good progress, few children reach the goals expected by the time they enter Year 1.

Progress in Key Stage 1 and Key Stage 2 is satisfactory but varies between years. The strong focus being given to better writing is proving positive. Pupils are showing an improvement in their ability to use a more interesting vocabulary and to write longer pieces of work. They are highly motivated by the wider range of opportunities to write for different purposes. For example, the work about 'Charlotte's Web' completed by pupils in Year 3/4 is of a good quality, both in content and presentation. Here, pupils demonstrate that they can write at length using a good vocabulary and with the presentation skills expected for their age. Overall, however, pupils' basic skills of spelling, handwriting and presentation are still too weak. Insufficient attention is paid to ensuring that a common approach is adopted by all classes. There is a need to share good practice more widely in order to raise standards further. Pupils' mathematical skills, particularly in mental arithmetic, are improving satisfactorily, the result of improved teaching. Teachers are devoting more time to mental arithmetic skills and this is helping to increase the rate of progress.

Progress on the areas for improvement identified by the inspection in November 2005:

- monitor pupils' progress and ensure the pupils reach the standards of which they are capable – satisfactory.

Personal development and well-being

The school's strategies to raise the attendance rate are proving successful, and attendance is now being sustained at around the national average. The reintroduction of the school council is proving pupil representatives with the opportunity to put forward a range of good ideas to support the school's improvement.

The behaviour of pupils around the building and in lessons is good, as seen on previous visits. A calm, orderly atmosphere prevails throughout the school and the pupils are courteous and polite. Good behaviour is recognised, encouraged and celebrated by adults. The headteacher's awards for particularly good efforts are highly valued by pupils. They are promoting an ethos in which it is 'cool to be keen'.

Quality of provision

The satisfactory teaching seen during the last visit has been sustained, although there is still too little good teaching. The staff have improved the quality of their lesson planning and they demonstrate a much better awareness of National Curriculum levels. They are making better use of assessment information to keep a close check on the progress of individual pupils. Not all teachers, however, are yet making full use of the assessment information when planning group tasks. This results in uneven progress with some pupils making slower progress than they should. There is also a lack of consistency between classes as to how the information is used and this too is inhibiting more rapid progress.

The teachers' marking of work is improving and pupils are given a better understanding of what they need to do next to improve. The inclusion of individual targets in pupils' books is giving them a clearer idea of how they should be attaining, although the lack of dates in the targets makes it difficult for staff to judge the rate of progress.

Teachers have openly embraced a new writing strategy and their enthusiasm for the project has resulted in some improvements to the quality of pupils' writing, but too little attention is paid to ensuring basic presentation, spelling and handwriting skills are as good as they should be. Not all teachers are yet encouraging pupils to work more productively and the lack of time targets for pupils results in a slow pace in some lessons. The school, together with the LA, needs to ensure that teaching is monitored more rigorously to improve the pace of lessons.

Pupils are well looked after and teaching assistants, through their assessments and support, play an important part in ensuring pupils with learning difficulties and those learning English as an additional language are able to take a full part in lessons.

Progress on the areas for improvement identified by the inspection in November 2005:

- help teachers make full use of assessments to focus teaching on eradicating underachievement – satisfactory.

Leadership and management

The headteacher has provided the school with a clear focus on raising standards. There is recognition that standards are not yet high enough and the focus of the work is on ensuring that this situation is rectified. The introduction of a new strategy for improving writing and the use of external consultants to improve pupils' work is beginning to bear fruit. However, the leadership is not yet sufficiently rigorous in its monitoring of teaching and learning to ensure there is a consistent approach across the school. There are examples of good practice but there are no formal systems for sharing this practice. The recent introduction of assessment trackers to assist teachers in keeping a close track on pupils' progress is not being monitored sufficiently closely to ensure all staff are making the best use of information when planning work for groups of pupils. The leadership is collating a good amount of useful data on pupils' progress. This is enabling it to identify if individuals are achieving as well as they should, and the school is using this information well to provide additional support. However, it is not yet sufficiently rigorous in using the information to pinpoint where there are spurts or delays in pupils' progress in particular groups or classes.

The governing body continues to offer sound support. A good number are regular visitors to the school and governors are much more aware of what is happening in school. They are asking challenging questions and their views are now being sought on matters concerning teaching and learning.

Progress on the areas for improvement identified by the inspection in November 2005:

- improve the ways in which the school examines its own work and the quality of its provision – satisfactory.

External support

The local authority continues to provide a range of effective support that is beginning to have an impact on standards and pupils' progress. There has been a clear focus on improving the quality of pupils' writing and consultants have offered sound advice to the school. As a result, classroom displays are more 'literacy rich' and the celebration of pupils' writing skills is becoming a regular feature of the school. As a result of the advice and guidance provided, teachers are now much more secure in teaching phonic skills in the Foundation Stage and Key Stage 1. A key focus of the LA plan was the advice given to subject leaders, enabling their monitoring to be more effective. It is appropriate that this aspect should be revisited to determine what additional guidance is needed.

Main Judgements

Progress since being subject to special measures – satisfactory.

Progress since previous monitoring inspection – satisfactory.

Newly qualified teachers may not be appointed.

Priorities for further improvement

- Press ahead with strategies to improve skills and achievement in writing.
- Be more rigorous in the monitoring of teaching and learning to ensure teachers make better use of time targets and inject more pace into lessons.
- Make more effective use of assessment data to identify where pupils are not making enough progress.

I am copying this letter to the Secretary of State, the chair of governors and the Director of Education for Stoke.

Yours sincerely

Paul Edwards
Additional Inspector